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THE BOOK OF ESTHER IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY

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CHAPTER VI

The nature of the danger recorded in the Book of Esther—The introduction of anthropomorphic images into the Zoroastrian religion—The reform against Zoroastrianism—Religion and state—Zoroastrianism as the supreme religion of the Persian empire—Anahita as the representative and manifestation of Ahuramazda—The effect of the reform—A Persian tradition—The reform affected the Jews—The religious persecutions—The strictly religious Jews—The festivals of Anahita—Historical reminiscences of the persecutions.

IN the preceding chapter we have discussed the term 'Jews' (יהודים), and found that it designates adherents of the Jewish religion, regardless of their extraction. This definition is borne out by historical facts. All dangers and persecutions the Jews experienced, from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes down to the present, were solely due to their religion, and not to their race extraction. Jews never suffered, as we already observed, if they conformed to the religion of the country where they dwelt, because such a step wiped out the mark that distinguished and separated them from the Gentiles. Jews living in a country for many hundreds of years were always considered aliens. But if one among them abandoned his religion he became at once a full-fledged citizen.

The danger impending over the Jews recorded in the Book of Esther was no exception in that respect. This also had a purely religious character. The current opinion

concerning the personality of Haman and his detestation of the Jewish race is absolutely erroneous. If a man is an inveterate enemy and a zealous persecutor of a certain religious creed, which he regards as pernicious to the welfare of his country, it does not follow that he is a wicked character. Haman was not worse than many Christian and Mohammedan potentates who, actuated by zeal for their own religions or by political reasons, fanatically persecuted their Jewish subjects, but who in other respects by no means showed vile dispositions. Haman never thought of destroying a whole race without cause on their part. His decree was not aimed at the Jewish people, but at the Jewish religion, and such a danger could be easily averted by renouncing it. His intention was the destruction of an idea, not of the individual who adhered to it. The fate of being exterminated was of course inevitable, if the Jewish people should remain stubborn and refuse to part with their religious belief. But the decree was of no effect if they ceased to be 'Jews' (יהודים). However, that religious persecution was not due to his personal aversion to the Jewish religion. It was dictated by the policy of the Persian empire, with which the Jewish religious conceptions came into collision.

Under the reign of Artaxerxes II an important innovation was introduced into the Persian religion. The Babylonian priest and historian Berosus informs us that the Persians knew of no images of gods until Artaxerxes II erected images of the goddess Anahita in all the centres of the Persian empire.¹ The statement of Berosus is confirmed by the cuneiform inscriptions.² Those of the former

¹ Müller's *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, 16.

² *Die Altpersischen Keilinschriften* (Weissbach und Bang), p. 45.

kings name only Ahuramazda, but Artaxerxes II, in his inscriptions, invokes Ahuramazda, Anahita, and Mithra. The last two gods belonged to the old popular belief, but were abandoned by the true Zoroastrians.³

This innovation, having been against the spirit of Zoroastrianism, could not have met with the unanimous approval of the Persians. Now Zoroaster's religion could have been preserved in purity only within a limited circle. 'The common people required religious food of a more sensual and vigorous character', as Ed. Meyer observes.⁴ Nevertheless, that limited circle was no doubt sufficiently numerous and influential to resent and oppose such an innovation. The erection of sanctuaries for Anahita in all the centres of the Persian dominion, even among non-Iranians as in Sardes and Damascus, indicates that Artaxerxes II desired to introduce the worship of this Iranian goddess throughout his empire. What may have caused Artaxerxes II to depart from the ways of his predecessors? It could not have been a mere fancy for overthrowing the old established principles of the Zoroastrian religion. Some important object must have been involved whose attainment he deemed necessary for the consolidation of his empire.

Religion was always intimately connected with the worldly power. All the institutions of the government were permeated by religious ideas.⁵ The king was merely the representative of the tutelary deity of the state. Accordingly the rank of the deity depended upon that

³ Cf. Ed. Meyer's article 'Artaxerxes', *Encycl. Brit.* and *G. A.*, III, 127.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵ On this subject see especially Jastrow's *Religious Aspects and Beliefs in Babylonia and Assyria*, 1911, chapter V.

of the king by whom it was represented, rising and falling with the fortunes of its representative. In one case, however, the deity assumed such a high position that it became the protector of the state which had raised it from obscurity, and its rank remained independent of that of its representative. Such was the case of the Babylonian god Marduk who was originally an insignificant local god of Babylon. But he became the head of the Babylonian pantheon, and was identified with the former Sumerian chief god, Enlil of Nippur, because Babylon had become, under the reign of Hammurabi, the capital of the Babylonian empire. This city, though politically no more of importance, after the passing of the Hammurabi dynasty, nevertheless retained its high position as the seat of Bēl-Marduk. The king who seized the hand of the god on the New Year festival considered himself the greatest monarch, and claimed by virtue of his position the rule of the world. The various Babylonian cities were united by a religious idea.

The constitutions of the governments of the Euphrates Valley present in that respect no exception to the general rule. The same fundamental idea of the body politic existed in most ancient states. Religion was in antiquity the basis of the political community. The state existed only through the gods. In claiming to fight for the glory of the gods and not for its own aggrandizement, the state could hold its own against other powers, and increased thereby in strength and prosperity.⁶ The theocratic constitution of Israel, as ordained by its Lawgiver, though never fully realized, was no novelty. The institutions of ancient Greece, as the Amphictyonic Council and the

⁶ See Ed. Meyer, *G. A.*, III, p. 167.

Olympics, which were of paramount importance for the unification of the various Greek states and the preservation of their independence in the Persian Wars, were of purely religious origin. The mighty empire of the Caliphs was founded upon Islam. The mediaeval Christian rulers pursued the same policy. Thus religion was in all periods considered the best cement for joining heterogeneous races into one united nation.

However, the Persian empire was different from other governments of antiquity. Here we do not find that intimate relationship between Temple and Palace. Although the Achaemenian kings had been the very representatives of the Zoroastrian religion and identified with all its movements,⁷ the Persian empire was not founded upon a religious idea. The conglomerate of the heterogeneous elements of which it consisted was kept together by force of arms, the effect of which could only be transitory. The Persian rulers felt themselves powerful enough to hold the conquered countries in obedience without the aid of religion. As a rule, they did not interfere with the creeds of their subjects, and made no attempts to disseminate their own religion in their dependencies. On the contrary, though considering the polytheistic religions, in which the gods were represented in human and animal shapes, puerile, the Persian kings treated them with all reverence. We must, of course, except the conduct of the demented Cambyses in Egypt.

When Artaxerxes II ascended the throne, the authority of the empire in the interior provinces was badly shaken. Insurrections frequently occurred, and the disintegration

⁷ See Jackson, *Zoroaster*, 'On the Date of Zoroaster'.

of the empire seemed imminent. Though its foreign relations were better than before his accession, this was not due to its power, but to the discord of the Grecian states. According to Plutarch: 'The Greeks who forced their way, as it were, out of the very palace of Artaxerxes, showed that the grandeur of the Persians was mere parade and ostentation'.⁸ The liberal policy pursued by the Persian kings, which at the time of their vigour largely contributed to the building up of the empire, as the subjugated countries soon became reconciled to its rule,⁹ was now, as the Persians were becoming somewhat enervated, the very source of its weakness.¹⁰ The Persian empire lacked an idea suitable to cement the divergent races into one united nation.

We may safely assume that the Persian patriots and the king's councillors were fully aware of the gradual decay of the empire, and devised various remedies to check its progress. One of the councillors, acquainted with Oriental history, and thus knowing how religious ideas were utilized for political purposes, and what powerful instruments they are for the consolidation of governments, suggested the religious idea as the best remedy for the unification of the empire: religion should form the link between king and subjects. If Zoroastrianism, of which the king was the visible representative, should be proclaimed as the

⁸ Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, XX. 1.

⁹ Ed. Meyer, *G. A.*, III, p. 94.

¹⁰ We have a somewhat analogous case in the Turkish empire. At the height of their power, the Turks were rather tolerant towards their subjects and did not impose upon them their religion and language. Owing to this policy, the subject nations were soon reconciled to their rule. If they had not been tolerant, the European Christian nations would have united themselves against them, and we may doubt whether they would have prevailed over a united Europe. But at present the policy that was formerly the source of their success, is the very cause of their downfall.

supreme religion of the empire, all the subjects being enjoined to accept it, the authority of the king, on account of its religious character, would be respected everywhere, and the common cause of religion would ensure the loyalty of the subjects.

However, that plan was not feasible without fundamentally modifying the doctrines of the Zoroastrian religion, which, as we have seen, was purely spiritual, without images, temples, and altars. The acceptance of the principles of this religion, which forbade the worship of idols and rejected all other divine beings beside Ahuramazda as spurious deities, was incompatible with the continuation of all other polytheistic religions throughout the Persian empire. The introduction of such a religion could not be made compulsory without simultaneously oppressing all other idolatrous creeds. Such a measure would undoubtedly have been the cause of a general uprising among the polytheistic subjects, and unfailingly would have caused the downfall of the Persian empire. The people, accustomed from immemorial times to the worship of visible gods, were incapable of comprehending a religion without physical representations. This religion could not appeal to the people, even if it should modify its monotheistic principle, and grant to them the permission to continue the worship of their own deities as manifestations of the supreme god Ahuramazda. There was indeed the winged circle, which the Zoroastrians were able to admit as a religious emblem without sacrificing any principle.¹¹ But no temple was ever erected to Ahuramazda, as Ed. Meyer points out,¹² even after the

¹¹ See chapter V.

¹² *G. A.*, III, p. 123.

Zoroastrian religion became corrupt. The Zoroastrians seemed to have held and strictly adhered to the principle that the God of heaven and earth could not be worshipped in the limited space of a house.¹³ Besides, the simple worship of this god, consisting in keeping up the Holy Fire, had nothing alluring and attractive for the people. Yet the Zoroastrian religion could not be made popular without images, temples, and altars.

The Daēvas, the gods of the old Iranian religion, which Zoroaster declared to be spurious deities, were at a later period, but already in the time of Herodotus,¹⁴ introduced into the Zoroastrian religion, though not yet represented by images. The highest among these Daēvas were Anahita and Mithra, equivalent to the deities Ishtar and Shamash in the Babylonian pantheon. Anahita, and as Marquart contends,¹⁵ in conjunction with Mithra, were, under the

¹³ The same idea is expressed also by the exilic Isaiah : 'The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ; where is the house that ye built unto me ? and where is the place of my rest ?' (66. 1), and also in the prayer of Solomon : 'Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee ; how much less the house that I have builded' (1 Kings 8. 27). We need not see in this idea Persian influence or vice versa, as it is simple enough to originate among various people independently. We shall further refer to the fact that the Babylonian supreme god Anu does not seem to have ever possessed a centre of his own, and it may be due to the same idea.

¹⁴ See Herodotus I, 131, where he states that the Persians believed in elementary gods, which is certainly not in accordance with Zoroaster's doctrines.

¹⁵ *Fundamente*, p. 37. It is noteworthy that Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, XXIII, 7, states that Artaxerxes paid homage to no other goddess but Hera. This goddess is evidently identical with Anahita, though the latter is identified by him with Artemis, XII, 4. We need not assume that he contradicts himself. Anahita has been identified with the Babylonian goddess Ishtar who appears in various manifestations ; as *Bēlit ilāni*, 'Mistress of the gods', she corresponds to Hera ; as daughter of Anu, to Pallas Athene ; as goddess of vegetation, to Demeter and also Persephone ;

reign of Artaxerxes II, selected to be represented as manifestations of Ahuramazda. Anahita was originally a goddess of vegetation, but later became goddess of fertility, and was represented with all the attributes of Ishtar. The main feature of her cult was prostitution.¹⁶ A divinity of this kind strongly appealed to the sensual propensities of the people, and was readily accepted everywhere by the polytheistic inhabitants of the Persian empire as chief deity and representative of the supreme god Ahuramazda. If Marquart's view, which seems to be corroborated by the cuneiform inscriptions of Artaxerxes, is correct, we may assume that the Mithra-Feast became about the same time the chief Persian festival, in which the king used to get drunk and performed the national dance of the Persians.

The introduction of that new element into the Zoroastrian religion was not due to the predilection of the king for Anahita. This was done as a political measure for the consolidation of the empire. Hence it was not left to the free will of the people whether they should imitate the example set by the king. The worship of that goddess was made compulsory. The supremacy of Anahita actually meant the supremacy of the ruling race. Her worship was made a test of loyalty. Those who refused to recognize her were marked as disloyal subjects. Marquart is unquestionably right in seeing in the erection of the images

as sister of the Sun-god, to Artemis; as goddess of fertility, to Aphrodite. All these attributes may have been taken over by Anahita. Plutarch may have not known it, and speaking from a Greek religious point of view, differentiates between Anahita of Susa who may have been worshipped as Hera, and between Anahita of Ecbatana who may have been identified with Artemis.

¹⁶ See Justi, *History*, p. 95, and Ed. Meyer, *G. A.*, III, p. 126 f.

of that goddess in all the provincial capitals of the Persian empire a royal law enjoining on all the inhabitants the worship of Anahita.¹⁷

Did that reform of the Zoroastrian religion produce the desired effect of more firmly uniting the various races of the Persian empire? This may or may not have been the case. We know only that it did not prevent that empire's final downfall. But we may reasonably doubt whether even united and in their full vigour the Persians could have prevailed against the military genius of their conqueror. However, that innovation was of paramount importance for the dissemination of the Zoroastrian religion. We may assume that the successful introduction of the latter, and in its wake of the Persian language, among the Turanians in Armenia and Cappadocia¹⁸ was chiefly due to this reform of Artaxerxes II. In Armenia, Anahita had temples at Artaxata and Yashtishat in Tauranitis, and especially in Erez in Akilisene, the whole region of which was consecrated to her.¹⁹ Here she had a golden statue, and Strabo states that the daughters of the noble families used to go there and prostitute themselves to strangers before their marriage.²⁰ She was worshipped likewise in Pontus and Cilicia.²¹ In Lydia she left numerous traces of her presence, and became amalgamated with Cybele.²² The Zoroastrian religion, which even among the Iranians could be kept in purity only in a limited circle, could hardly

¹⁷ *Fundamente*, p. 37.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 38, and especially the article 'Armenia (Zoroastrian)' in Hastings' *Encyclop.*

¹⁹ See the article 'Anaitis', *ibid.*

²⁰ Strabo's *Geography*, XI, 14, 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XI, 8; XII, 3.

²² See *Rev. Archeol.*, 3rd Series, VI, 107; VII, 156.

have gained adherents outside of Iran without undergoing a complete change. Formerly there was a gulf between the popular religion and that of Zoroaster, as the common people, though Zoroastrians, by no means abandoned the old Iranian *Dāēvas*.²³ This gulf was now being bridged over by the innovation of Artaxerxes II, which sanctioned the popular religious conceptions, and introduced them into the system of the Zoroastrian religion. Both Zoroastrianism and Christianity succeeded in gaining adherents and establishing themselves by conforming more or less to the ideas and customs of the people.

Jackson, in his *Zoroaster*, observes: 'Tradition, according to Brahman Yasht, asserts that Ardashir the Kayan, whom they call Vohuman, son of Spen-dat, and whom we know as Ardashir Dirazdast, or "the long-handed", is the one "who made the religious current in the whole world". Actual history agrees with this, in so far as it shows that Artaxerxes Longimanus, or "long-handed", was an ardent Zoroastrian ruler. From the pages of history we, furthermore, learn that by the time of the last Achaemenians, at least, Zoroastrianism is practically acknowledged to have become the national religion of the Iranians'.²⁴ In the

²³ It is seen by the Persian proper names compounded with the names of various Iranian gods, as Ed. Meyer points out, *G. A.*, III, p. 126.

²⁴ P. 133 f. A similar view is expressed by Darmesteter, *Avesta*, p. lv: 'New progress marked the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus'. He goes even so far as to contend: 'It was he who blended the worship of Anahita with that of the Iranian Anahita (the ascription of that innovation to Artaxerxes Mnemon, by Clemens Alexandrinus (Stromata I) must rest on a clerical error, as in the time of Herodotus, who wrote under Longimanus, the worship of Anahita had already been introduced into Persia)' (note 3). But Darmesteter's contention rests on a logical error. Berosus (apud Clem.) does not state that the worship of Anahita was introduced by Artaxerxes II. He merely states that the latter was the first who

light of our observations, the matter will be viewed differently. The later Persian scholars, and even the compilers of the Zend-Avesta which, as Renan observes, is a Talmud rather than a Bible,²⁵ had no more exact knowledge of Persian chronology than the Talmudic Rabbis. The tradition of the dissemination of the Zoroastrian religion being due to Ardashir is undoubtedly correct, but the king of that name was not Artaxerxes Longimanus, but his grandson Artaxerxes Mnemon. Besides, we cannot find any historical source that presents the former king as an ardent Zoroastrian. Concerning the reference of Brahman Yasht to Vohuman son of Spen-dat we may perhaps see in it an obscure tradition referring to Haman (= *Ῥαμανος*) son of Hamdatha.²⁶

taught the Persians to worship anthropomorphic images, in erecting statues of Anahita. Darmesteter evidently overlooked the fact that Herodotus himself, who informs us of the worship of Anahita by the Persians, distinctly states that the Persians knew of no images of the gods. Moreover, the same statement is given in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, V, 1, and it is unlikely that he should have committed twice the same error.

²⁵ In his *History*, VII, 14.

²⁶ *Vohūman* is rendered into Greek as Omanos, as Strabo, in his *Geography*, XI, 14, states: 'There were founded both the sanctuaries of Anaitis and of the associated gods, *Omanos* and *Anadatos*'. The latter names remarkably resemble *Haman* and *Hamdatha*. Strabo further writes: 'These things were customary in the sanctuaries of Anaitis and Omanos' (XI, 16). The eleventh Persian month *Vohumanah* is called in Cappadocian *Ῥομανα* (Lagarde, *Purim*, p. 33). *Spenda-dat* means 'given by the Holy Spirit' (Justi, *Iran. Namenb.*). *Haoma*, which is the most sacred and most powerful offering, comprising the life of the whole vegetable kingdom, and by drinking of it man will become immortal on the Day of Resurrection (Darmesteter, *l.c.*, p. 69) may have been the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Thus *Hōm-data* and *Spendadat* may be synonymous names. Pseudo-Smerdis, whom Darius in his Behistun-inscription calls Gaumata, is by Ctesias called *Sphenda-dates* (see chapter IX). Thus it seems that *Spenda-dat* is a priestly title, and not a proper name. In the light of these observations, Cassel's view, quoted above (chapter II), that Haman and his

The limited circle of the true Zoroastrians no doubt resented that innovation and corruption of the Persian religion, and must have denounced it as heresy. But the latter may have submitted sooner or later. We cannot say to what extent they went in their zeal for the preservation of the purity of the Zoroastrian religion. They may or may not have sacrificed themselves in their opposition to that innovation. But we can with all certainty assert that the only part of the populace which absolutely refused to comply with the royal will and become idolaters were the strictly religious Jews. The latter were, of course, marked as disloyal subjects. Defying the authority of the empire was nothing short of high treason, and could not be tolerated. The officials had to enforce obedience to the royal decree, without exempting any person, and could not grant special privileges to the Jews.

We have already observed that as long as the Persian religion was undefiled by idolatrous practices, the Jews in all probability boasted in the presence of the Persians and their officials that their own religion was closely akin to or identical with that of Zoroaster. The Persians could not but be flattered by the compliment paid to their own religion, it being of such a high character that non-Iranians pride themselves in having similar religious conceptions. This established good will and friendship between Persians and Jews. The favours granted to the Jews by the Persian kings may have been due to that fact. Now the condition was different. In refusing to worship Anahita, the Jews showed that the Persian religion was not good enough for them. This could not fail to arouse the hatred

father belonged to the tribe of the Magians, is rather probable. Their names may have been priestly titles and not proper names.

of the gentiles. It was of course the cause of arguments, and frequently led to personal attacks. The officials who had continually to punish the Jews for their stubbornness, and to settle the quarrels between them and their enemies, considered them a constant source of annoyance, a turbulent, disloyal element among a peaceful and loyal populace.

This was a period of religious persecutions, similar to those the Jews experienced under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, and frequently in the Middle Ages. Yet the former persecutions were somewhat different from the latter. The Jews were not ordered 'to forsake their own laws'²⁷, but to recognize the supremacy of Anahita, and to worship her. The latter was the more dangerous to the Jewish religion. Seeing in the worship of Anahita a mere formality, many Jews pretended compliance with the will of the king without regarding such a step as apostasy from Judaism. These Jews, though bitterly resenting the force that compelled them to pay respect to idols they abominated, practically did not suffer any inconvenience, and still remained on friendly terms with their neighbours. The only victims of those persecutions were the strictly religious Jews.

We have seen that in post-exilic times the only mark of 'Jews' (יהודים) was the rejection of idols, and under Persian rule, that mark was obliterated. The business documents of the Persian period show that a large number of Jews of that time were engaged in commerce. We may well assume that this was the only course open to them for providing means of subsistence. A nation, as a rule, is not disposed to admit large numbers of foreigners into its country to take possession of the soil and to settle as

²⁷ 1 Macc. i. 41.

peasants, unless as bondmen. And not every man is able to be an artisan. But primitive nations readily welcome people who serve as middlemen between producer and consumer. Men of that calling do not live crowded together, but settle, whenever afforded an opportunity, in localities where competition is not too keen. Thus scattered in small numbers throughout the provinces of the Persian empire, the Jews were scarcely noticeable, as long as they peacefully attended to their own affairs. The succeeding generations of the immigrants were in all probability not different in language, dress, habits, and many even in their names, from the people among whom they dwelt. Now and then some neighbours learned incidentally that those people had a peculiar creed of their own. But a casual observer would have held them to belong to the strict Zoroastrians. Even the keen-eyed Herodotus who noticed every feature of the Oriental peoples, did not know the Jews as adherents of a special creed. With the corruption of the Persian religion, the Jews were thrown back into the former state under Babylonian rule. Those who refused to participate in the worship of Anahita, pleaded that the faith they professed prohibited the worship of idols, and thus became known as adherents of a different creed. A barrier was now being erected between Jews and Gentiles. The former could not faithfully adhere to their religion, without being recognized as 'Jews' (יהודים).

If there is any reliance on historical analogy, we may accept it as an indisputable fact that the innovation of Artaxerxes II introduced into the Persian religion was the cause of Jewish persecutions. It would be of no consequence whether there were records testifying to those events or not. We must bear in mind that the real

sufferers were the zealous, pious Jews, who formed only a very small portion of the Jewish people. The persecutions were, in all probability, occasioned at the time of the high festivals of Anahita,²⁸ when the Jews, in refusing to participate in the festivities, sharply contrasted with the rest of the people. Only those denounced by malignant neighbours suffered the penalty of the law. The Jews settled in small towns and villages where there were no sanctuaries of Anahita, could easily under some excuse stay away from the festivities without exposing themselves to any danger. The hatred caused by the refusal of the pious Jews to recognize the divinity of that goddess naturally reacted upon all the Jews, who were looked at askance by the people and the authorities. However, if they held their peace, and did not express any opinion averse to the Persian religion, they could not be legally punished. The execution of a number of Jews in the various centres of the Persian empire was not so important an event as to be recorded by historians.

But we have, as it would appear, some record of those Jewish persecutions by the Persians. Hecataeus, according to Flavius Josephus, in his *Polemics against Apion*, states that the Persians erected temples and altars in Palestine, and attempted to turn the Jews away from their religion.²⁹ This statement refers of course to the reform of the Zoroastrian religion by Artaxerxes II.³⁰ The historian Graetz, in his *History of the Jews*,³¹ describes that event

²⁸ See chapter VII.

²⁹ Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, I.

³⁰ Willrich (*Judaica*, p. 92) does not believe this statement, and naively asks: 'Who should have attempted in the Persian period to do so?' He ought to have read Graetz's *History of the Jews* and his references to Berossus before dealing with Jewish history.

³¹ German edition II, p. 208, and his notes, pp. 412 ff.; Engl. edition I, p. 4c8.

as follows: 'The relations between the Judeans and the Persians were at the same time somewhat disturbed. The latter, influenced by foreign example, began to practise idolatry. The goddess of love, who under the different names Beltis, Mylitta, or Aphrodite, was constantly brought under the notice of the Persians, exercised a powerful influence upon them. The victories they had achieved, and the riches they had acquired inclined them to sensual pleasures. They were, therefore, easily enthralled by the goddess and induced to serve and worship her. As soon as they had adopted this deity, they gave her a Persian name, and included her in their mythology. Artaxerxes II sanctioned her worship, and had images of her placed everywhere in his great kingdom, in the principal cities Babylon, Susa, and Ecbatana, as well as in Damascus and Sardes, and in all the towns of Persia and Bactria . . . Thus the spiritual link which had bound the Persians to the followers of Judaism—their common abhorrence of idolatry—was broken. . . . Having compelled his own people to bow down to this newly adopted goddess of love, Artaxerxes tried, as it appears, to force her worship upon the Judeans; the latter were cruelly treated in order to make them renounce their religion, but they chose the severest punishment, and even death rather than abjure the faith of their fathers.' This account of that event, though not exact in details in the light of our investigations, is in the main correct. Graetz did not see the real object of the introduction into the Persian religion of the cult of that goddess, nor the reason for enforcing her worship upon the Jews. It was certainly not due to a mere fancy of the king to make her worship obligatory on all inhabitants of the Persian empire. The departure from

the policy of his predecessors not to interfere with the creeds of their subjects was urged upon this king for political reasons.

However, Hecataeus was acquainted with the circumstances of that event only as far as it concerned the Jews of the province Judea. Here was the centre of the cult of Jahveh. The whole province almost exclusively inhabited by a people which detested idolatry was forced to the worship of idols.³² The disturbances caused by these proceedings must have been sensational, and excited wide-spread interest. Egypt, which a few years before the accession of Artaxerxes II recovered its independence from the Persian empire, and was continually in a state of war with the latter, must have watched with keen satisfaction the unsettled conditions in the neighbourland, and we may reasonably conjecture that it incited the Jews to rise against their oppressors and promised them its assistance. But the Jews may have profited by the experiences of their past, well knowing that the friendship of Egypt was just as responsible for the downfall of the states of Israel and Judah as the armies of Assyria and Babylonia,³³ and preferred to suffer rather than to rise in arms and 'to trust in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt'.³⁴ Hecataeus

³² As to the Samaritans, though they were worshippers of Jahveh, they were not yet pure monotheists, and still continued 'to serve their gods and to fear Jahveh', as the author of Kings described their religion. At any rate, their religious conceptions were not different from those of the former Israelitish inhabitants (see 2 Kings 17. 34-41). The change in their religious conceptions belongs to a later period.

³³ Both prophets, Isaiah (20. 5, 6; 30. 3, 4) and Jeremiah (37. 7), warned the Judeans not to rely upon the promises of the Egyptians, and not to rise against the Assyrians and Babylonians, and their state would have survived if they had accepted this advice.

³⁴ 2 Kings 18. 21.

who flourished in the fourth century B. C. E., and lived in Egypt as the close friend of Ptolemy I, was a reliable authority on the events of that period in Judea. But he had no information concerning the same kind of persecutions in the interior provinces of the Persian empire. Here the persecutions were not directed against a people but against individuals who resisted the royal decree. If numbers of them were on certain occasions imprisoned and executed, events of this kind were not so rare as to attract special attention.

While we have no external testimony for the latter persecutions, we are fortunately in possession of a biblical record testifying to that effect. We find such a record, evidently based on a true tradition, in the Book of Daniel, in the third chapter. The narrative, embellished with miraculous and anachronistic features, states: 'The king Nebuchadnezzar made a golden image of large dimensions and set it up in the Babylonian city of Dura. Then he assembled the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to be present at the dedication of that image and the performance of the rites. Then he proclaimed by heralds that all people, nations, and languages should fall down and worship the golden image at the sound of the music of the solemn service; and whosoever should not comply with the command, should the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore all the people did as the king commanded. But Chaldeans came and accused certain Jews to have no regard for the king's commands, refusing to serve his gods and to worship the golden image. Then these Jews were brought before the king, but even in his

presence they remained stubborn, still refusing to do his command. Then they were bound and cast into the burning fiery furnace, but the fire had no power over them.' ³⁵

Extremely divergent opinions are held concerning the historicity, contents, and tendencies of the Book of Daniel. But there can be no disputing that its author was of high intellect and well acquainted with Oriental customs. This account, however, seems so singular as to reflect upon the intellect of its author. Does it stand to reason that any polytheist should ever have refused to worship an idol, unless threatened by being cast into a fiery furnace? But divesting this account of all anachronistic and miraculous elements, it presents a plain historical tradition of the innovation of Artaxerxes II introduced into the Zoroastrian religion; it describes how this king—as ruler of Babylon styled Nebuchadnezzar—erected a golden image of Anahita in Babylonia, how he forced the Zoroastrians under the penalty of death to bow down to it, and the royal command was complied with by all except the strictly religious Jews. This tradition presents the antecedents of and the prologue to the Book of Esther. It bears at the same time testimony to the monotheistic character of the Zoroastrian religion and the high religious principles of its adherents, that only the choice between life and death compelled them to submit to the royal will. We may well assume that they deeply resented this command and secretly sympathized with its Jewish victims. How exact in some points this tradition is may be seen by the fact that this golden image is said to have been set up in *Dura* = *Der* = *Dürilu*, in North

³⁵ Dan. 3. 1-31.

Babylonia, in the neighbourhood of Babylon. This locality was from ancient times the centre of Ishtar with whose attributes Anahita was invested. Just as the supreme Babylonian god Anu never possessed a centre of his own,³⁶ but was always worshipped in conjunction with his daughter Ishtar, who was the representative of her father, so Ahuramazda was worshipped through his manifestation Anahita, and never possessed a temple of his own. There was indeed a burning fiery furnace. But it was not for the purpose of casting into it the recalcitrants to the worship of Anahita. This was the Holy Fire, the symbol of Ahuramazda. The Holy Fire would have been defiled by casting into it human beings. In this tradition we thus have an authentic record of that event, and of the Jewish persecutions in the East of that period.

It is of interest to find that the Talmud regards the danger impending over the Jews as punishment for their transgression in having submitted to the worship of the image described in the Book of Daniel. It is not impossible that the Talmud had some dim tradition as to the connexion of those two events. It is stated: ³⁷ 'The Jews of that period deserved destruction for having bowed down to the image erected by Nebuchadnezzar; but as they merely pretended to worship it, God intended to scare them as a punishment for their cowardice.'

³⁶ The city of Erech was properly the centre of *Nana-Ishtar*, not of Anu.

³⁷ Megillah 12a. But the Rabbis, led astray by Daniel's chronology, believed that the event of Purim occurred within the seventy years of the captivity, and that Ahasuerus reigned not long after the death of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. *ibid.* 16a).

(To be continued.)